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This study in historical literacy investigates the reading of John Richard Edmunds (1807- 1873), a lawyer, legislator, and planter who lived in Halifax County, Virginia. The researcher has done a cross-disciplinary study in order to understand what Edmunds was likely to have read and what his library was likely to have contained. The paper summarizes some of the ideologies associated with the antebellum South such as Stoicism and Romanticism. It also gives a brief history of the printing industry and of periodicals in the South during this time period.

Headings:

Books and reading -- Southern States

Southern States -- Intellectual Life -- 19th century

Printing -- Nineteenth Century

Virginia -- Social conditions -- 19th century

# THE ANTEBELLUM LIBRARY OF JOHN RICHARD EDMUNDS

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Approved by:

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# Contents

# Introduction

John Edmunds was a farmer, legislator, and lawyer who lived from 1807 to 1874 in Halifax County, Virginia. The picture that emerges from a few speeches, his obituaries, and the biographer John Little is a man of his time and place- deeply proud of the state of Virginia; having a love of the land; somewhat nostalgic for the past; an owner of slaves. He was interested in promoting justice and knowledge, at least for those who were considered to have rights, white males. He seems to have been generally liked; he is described by Little (276) and his obituaries portray him as unassuming in manner but full of initiative, an effective speaker and successful farmer. When he died, the local papers praised him:

> John R. Edmunds was power in the country, and in his darkest hour, he united the duties of statesman, Christian, and philanthropist and became a benefactor of his people… Edmunds was straight as an arrow, endowed with superhuman energy and whether along the highway or over his broad acres, his mind as well as his horse was always in full gallop, hailing you with some cheery word or stinging sarcasm; but never drawing the rein, on he swept until he died. (E. Edmunds[1])

The article goes on to compare him with his neighbors: "…while not having the eloquence of Flouroy nor the peculiar wit of Bruce…he had a more powerful mind than either…" (quote from Edmunds). Edmunds' mind is emphasized whether described as "always in full gallop" or when he is compared to his rivals'. To get an idea of the life of Edmunds' mind, and what "life of the mind" meant in the antebellum South, is the goal of this study.

In trying to accomplish this I searched for answers to these questions: What was the relationship between literacy and culture in antebellum south? What were Edmunds' specific interests? What books were popular in the antebellum South? What was the intellectual life of an educated slaveholder? My goal was to create a list of fifty books and periodicals that Edmunds could have reasonably held in his library.

**John R. Edmunds**

Edmunds was educated, having graduated from UVA with honors (according to his obituary in Richmond Dispatch), and earned a law degree from William and Mary around 1834. He entered the legislature in his twenties, and where he was admired for his skill as an orator. The law profession was so crowded that it was very difficult, especially for young graduates, to find work (Carmichael 152). Since Edmunds was involved with planting and politics, he may have considered his law degree a useful preparation for a future as a statesman and farmer rather than as a practicing lawyer.

Edmunds was a supporter of the Confederacy. He was one of the two delegates from Virginia to elect Jefferson Davis; and after the war he was pardoned

by Andrew Johnson for his part in the seccession (the bill to elect Davis, with his name on it, and Johnson's pardon are now in his restored home). Later he headed a committee to petition the president to end the military occupation of the South.

Edmunds was a significant slaveholder; according to a rough estimate he owned 120 slaves before the war.[2] This put him easily into what Whitescarver called the "planter class", which he defined as owners of 30 slaves or more. Whitescarver wrote that about 1 in 60 whites fell into this category. Since the barbaric practice of owning slaves seems contradictory with the values of democracy, equality, and openness to ideas, it seems ironic that many southerners who considered themselves dedicated to civilized interests continued to do so.

I found no record of Edmunds traveling outside the state of Virginia. The University of Virginia, though very well-respected, was probably more comfortable to a southerner than northern universities, which Walter Monteiro called "nurseries of abolitionism" (cited Carmichael 102). But Edmunds, who was said to be "informed on every leading subject" (Dispatch May 12, 1873) must have been aware of the different views being expressed in the debate over slavery which was intensifying before the civil war. His wife, Mildred Carrington Coles, was the granddaughter of Isaac A. Coles, secretary to Jefferson and Madison, who had used his influence to protest slavery (Tate 54).

Edmunds was an active citizen and appears to have been genuinely concerned for the declining welfare and the future of his state. He lived when Virginia's education and economy was falling behind the North's. Young Virginians coined the term "old fogy" for the older generation in power at that time, whom they accused of

clinging to Virginia's colonial ways of doing things instead of trying to adapt to the new industrial economy (Carmichael 38). On July 4, 1848 Edmunds took made a speech that reflected many Virginians' frustration with the way things were going in his state.

> We look back on the time when Virginia stood foremost in the Union of States in numbers, in power, and in greatness… But the day of her relative greatness has passed. We have lived to see -- for some survivors of the Revolution are still amongst us -- other States outstrip her in all the elements of natural wealth. In education, numbers, agriculture, commerce, and manufacturers, States have sprung up from the wilderness, remote from the marts of commerce and ocean navigation : one has surpassed her, and other are rapidly going by. (*Edmunds to the Agricultural Clubs*, 1848).

Unlike those of the Tidewater families, the Edmunds family's roots in Virginia only went back to the time of the Revolution. Edmunds' paternal grandfather, Nicholas Edmunds, had bought a tract of land in Halifax County in piedmont Virginia. He built "Elm Hill", a plantation which he passed on to his son Henry Edmunds and on which John Edmunds grew up. John Edmunds farmed and later built his home "Redfield" on a part of this piece of this land. Redfield was sold out of the Edmunds family in the late nineteenth century and was uninhabited for decades. In 1960s, the house was bought and restored by my grandparents Robert (a descendent of John R.) and Mary Lewis Edmunds.

My question was what the library at Redfield would have contained when John R. Edmunds built it.

[1] This quotation was taken from the notes of Emma Edmunds, ("Notes from the Family Reunion Tour") (2000) based on her research on the life of John R. Edmunds. Edmunds works at the University of Virginia as Assistant Director of University Publications.

[2] E. Edmunds reports that she spoke with Charlotte Bar, an African- American woman who has traced her descent to Mildred Edmunds, a slave to Edmunds' wife. Bar's research indicated that J.R. Edmunds owned approximately 120 slaves.

## Literature Review

There is disagreement as to whether during the economic decline Virginians were also falling behind in the area of culture and literature. Some of the writers I studied portrayed southerners as active, wide readers, while others believed that their reading was limited to Walter Scott. The writers such as Cantrell who studied their reading habits in detail were more optimistic about their reading than writers like Tebbel, who looked at their reading in terms of the publishing industry and compared it with the North. Here are the sources I researched to learn about southerners' literacy:

**Cantrell's <u>Reading Habits of Antebellum Southerners</u> (1960)**

Cantrell's thesis is that the cultural history of the antebellum southerners has been distorted because no one knows if or what they were reading. He states that there has never been a detailed, cross-class study the literature that they came in contact with (ix). He attempts to do the first such study by analyzing the journals of thirteen southerners. The journalists represent all walks of life in the South. A few of them would have probably read more widely than Edmunds, such as Alexander Beaufort Meek and George Gilman Smith, who published books; one (Octavia LeVert) was leader of a salon; one (William Blackford) was the son of a newspaper

editor, worked a tutor and was future headmaster of a well-known boarding school; but others were barely educated.

In coming to understand the probable library of and antebellum Southern lawyer, I did not select books exclusively from Cantrell's list of books read, but I made notes of works read by three or more of the diarists, taking that to mean it was fairly well-known to literate Southerners.

**Diarists studied by Cantrell**

Brief profiles of these diarists help to suggest ideas and influences that were part of everyday experiences.

Lancelot Minor Blackford, another Virginian, was born in 1846 and lived most of his life in Lynchburg. Like John R. Edmunds, he went to the University of Virginia (earning an A.B. in 1859 and an M.A. in 1860). After serving in the Civil War he was principal of Episcopal High School from 1870 to 1913. Other who were intense readers were John Randolph, a very well-known and well-read senator from Virginia; Octavia LeVert, the founder of a literary salon in Alabama, and David Schenck, another lawyer and judge, from Lincolnton, North Carolina. Like Edmunds, he promoted the cause of secession- he was the youngest member of the secessionist convention.

William Johnson was a free black living in Mississippi. He had been born a slave in 1809 and became free in 1820 through a bill passed by the Mississippi Legislature. He owned a successful barber shop in Natchez, property, and owned

four of his own black slaves. He was completely self-taught and taught his children to read and write.

Several of the diarists were devoted to the ministry: John Cornish was an Episcopal priest; Martha E. Crawford was the first woman missionary to represent the Southern Baptists; and George Gilman Smith, a Methodist minister and author of many books on the lives of Southerners, especially those who were important to the church.

Alexander Beaufort Meek was in the first class to graduate from the University of Alabama after it opened in 1831. He studied law and passed the bar exam in 1835, only about five years after Mr. Edmunds did. After serving in the military, he was elected in the Alabama Legislature, where he was instrumental in improving the school system. In addition he was a significant a writer of poetry, and history. Cantrell states that his best volume of poems was Songs and Poems of the South (1857).

The career of George Mercer of Savannah bore some resemblance to Mr. Edmunds'. He graduated from Princeton then from law school at the University of Virginia. He was a successful lawyer, and a congressman in the Georgia Legislature, and served as director of the Georgia Historical Society, president of the City Board of Education, and curator of the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas of Georgia and Benjamin Leonard Covington Wailes of Georgia resembled Edmunds in that they grew up and spent their adult lives before the civil war on plantations. Like Edmunds, Wailes served in the legislature

and was particularly interested in the scientific aspect of agriculture. His property in Warren County, Georgia was approximately the size of Redfield.

William H. Woolridge spent his life in Pickens County, Alabama. He was not well-educated, and his diary, according to Cantrell is careless and difficult to read. His family appears to have owned a few slaves.

**Davis's Colonial Southern Bookshelf (1979) and Intellectual Life in Jefferson's Virginia (1964)**

Richard B. Davis studied reading of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth, and like Cantrell, he views the South as intellectually alive. The Colonial Bookshelf is less relevant to Edmunds's life than Cantrell's is, because the readers he studied were mainly from the elite tidewater region. But it was useful to compare titles to see if they had an enduring popularity. Many of them did, which indicated that they were not only popular in Edmunds' time but actually a part of the culture in which he was living. Davis' Intellectual Life is mainly a study of those who were educated and influential, such as Thomas Jefferson and John Randolph of Roanoke. This book more relevant to Edmunds' life since Davis writes about the early part of the nineteenth century and his focus has moved westward along with the development of the state.

**Whitescarver's Political Economy, Schooling, and Literacy in the South (1995)**

Whitescarver argues in his dissertation that there were "not one, but many Souths" based on the differences in the economies and schooling in different areas of

the antebellum South. He demonstrates this by juxtaposing the counties of Edgecombe and Buncombe County. The book's meticulous research revealed that around half of the total population in the antebellum South was illiterate (158).

**Lehmann-Haupt's The Book in America (1951) and Tebbel's A History of Publishing in America (1972).**

Lehmann-Haupt's book follows the history of all forms of printed material in the United States, and allowed me to compare the trajectory of the printing industry in the North and South. The reason that the printing industry stagnated in the south while it thrived in the North was that cities in the North grew more quickly. He points out that even the giant New York publishing houses started out small and grew with the city.

Tebbel's History of the Book, in four volumes, is a thorough and well-written explanation of publishing in the United States. It includes an overview of the reading habits of southerners during this period. Unlike Cantrell, Tebbel portrays southerners as backward- thinking people whose reading was mainly limited to Walter Scott.

**Culture in the South: Carmichael's The Lost Generation (2005)**

Carmichael's book examines the tensions that existed before the civil war between the generation that was in power (Edmunds' generation), and the younger generation. Carmichael's analysis of the friction between the two generations is revealing, particularly where he compares generational attitudes toward intellectual openness and education.

**Wyatt-Brown's Southern Honor (1982)**

Bertram Wyatt-Brown discusses the antebellum South as an honor culture. His view, which Whitescarver agreed with, was that the South's emphasis on external honor undermined the importance of the written word. He uses his own Alabama family as a starting-point in trying to understand the values that southerners sincerely believed in, which led them to adhere so sincerely to the righteousness of a social system that included slavery. In his view these values also suppressed literacy, and also influenced education and the dissemination of knowledge.

**Percy's Stoicism in the South (1962), Gretlund's Frames of Southern Mind (1998)**

The idea of stoicism expanded my concepts in terms of both reading and literary culture in the South. Percy's essay "Stoicism in the South", which appeared in *Commonweal* in 1956 (July 6) is beautifully written. It romanticizes upper-class southerners to some extent, portraying them as noble stoics in the style of Robert E. Lee. It is a contrast to Wyatt-Brown's and Tebbel's view of ante-bellum southerners as honor-seeking, machismo people. The distinction that Percy makes between Christianity and Stoicism, in claiming that Southerners were Stoic rather than Christian, however, is difficult to do since the Apostle Paul is said to have borrowed heavily from the Stoic tradition. Gretlund's analysis of Percy's article is knowledgeable and sophisticated, leading further to references to the influence of Stoicism on Southern culture.

# Southern Culture

Writers about the South are very much at odds in their views of southern culture. The researchers that I read had interpretations of Southerners from narrow-minded and backward, to noble, thoughtful, and stoic. Whatever the Southerners' culture was in reality, theories about their culture are interesting because we might presume these attitudes to be indicators of their reading habits.

## Honor Culture

Some believe that it was the South's honor-bound culture that was at the root of both the system of slavery, and it culture, which some see as more literary than oral. According to this view, the South was a culture of honor, while the North was a culture of conscience. In Wyatt-Brown's interpretation, what was seen as honor was the result of outward emblems of status, such as land, wealth, military distinction, political power, and the reputation of one's family. The contrary is shame, which comes with public embarrassment in the form of failure. A culture of conscience is based on inner authenticity and ethics based on independent principles. When the conscience is violated, guilt, or the private discomfort that arises at the dissonance between one's behavior and one's principles, follows.

Wyatt-Brown writes “differing economic systems may coexist peaceably, in the same country. But when moral assumptions diverge, the chances for disunion are much greater” (17). He argues that the Southerners’ attention to honor led them to put less value on inner life. The “prominence of the spoken word and physical gesture in the antebellum South as opposed to interior thinking or words and ideas conveyed through the medium of the page”… was the result of “the stress upon external, public factors in establishing public worth in the antebellum South”. Southerners valued the written word, but it is clear that they intensely valued the spoken word and that they valued status. John Edmunds, with his interest in law and public affairs, was typical of most of his countrymen.

**Stoicism**

In his essay “Stoicism and the South” Walker Percy argued that “The Greatness of the South, like the greatness of the English Squirarchy, has always had a stronger Greek flavor than it has a Christian. Its nobility and graciousness was the nobility and graciousness of the old Stoa”(343). In his view, Robert E. Lee and other upper-class southerners learned a sense of duty and self-restraint from the stoics. In Percy’s view the Southerner was more likely to have Epictatus than the Psalms in his pocket (3). In her book Frames of Southern Mind in a chapter called “Mint-Julleping with Marcus Aurelius”, Jan Nordby (75) states that Epictatus’ *The Enchiridon* and Marcus Aurelius’ Meditations instructed “generations” of southerners.

**Revolution and Postcolonialism**

O'Brien presents two more interpretations of Southern thought. He writes that southerners, having led the Revolution against England, retained a revolutionary frame of mind. "They like to sit in judgement", he writes, "on the fundamentals of what made a society, of how constitutions interacted with human nature, of how legislation affected the running of an economy or household". When the South began loosing its power to do this, it's natural reaction for it to start a revolution.

Postcolonialism, on the other hand, was a frame of mind in which southerners saw themselves as satellites of England. "To most southerners", he points out, "Madame de Stael mattered more than Ralph Waldo Emerson. The United States was a political rather than an intellectual comity" (4).

**Culture and Reading**

I think the difference in interpretations of the southerners' culture is part of the reason behind the difference in the assumptions about their reading habits.

Lehmann-Haupt and Tebbel's bleak view of intellectual life in the South. Tebbel (204) quotes Thomas Nelson Page who wrote that Southerners were "absolutely and incurably blind" to uniquely American literature. "If the work was written south of the Mason's and Dixon's line," he complained bitterly "it was incontinently condemned as 'trashy'; if it emanated from the North, it was vehemently denounced as Yankee…" (204). Stern, also quoted southerners frustrated with difficulty of printing their work in the South: "The papers have recently been filled with articles in reference to Southern Publishing Houses; and much regret has been expressed that the expense of book-printing in the South should be so great, as

to deter an author from patronizing the publishers in his own section" (Stern 62). On the other hand, Cantrell, who, especially Cantrell, studied habits much more closely, argue that southerners were frequent writers. Cantrell showed that Shakespeare's work was pervasive and Milton was almost equally well-known. Part of the difference between northern and southern reading was that southerners saw England and, slightly less, Europe as its cultural and literary authority. If few southerners were aware of the Transcendentalist movement, as one writer claimed, it may not have shown pure lack of interest in literature, but a different view about what was important in literature.

Is it possible that Edmunds was influenced by the Stoics when he wrote, "We must inculcate the lesson that labor is honorable… We have a higher and nobler destiny to fulfill… by toil, privation, and deeds of noble daring, they [the Virginians who fought the Revolutionary War] gave to the State honor, power and influence" (*Agricultural Address*, 1848). The few words that he left behind seem to reflect the Stoicism, the Honor Culture, and the Romanticism which writers have used to interpret the South.

# Master List of Books and Explanation

The following are the fifty books that I believed were likely to have been in Edmunds' library. I based my choices on the popularity of the books in the South during the antebellum period and the likelihood that Edmunds would have owned them given his specific interests. I found many of the books in Cantrell; If a book were read by three or more of the diarists he studied (and there were about 100 that fit in this category), that seemed strong evidence that it was representative of what was read then (though many of the books I read were read by fewer than three.) I looked at studies of Southern reading such as Davis's two books and O'Brien; I studied advertisements in newspapers and almanacs; and information books in the Worldcat database.

I kept in mind a profile of Edmunds as an educated farmer and legislator, interested in law and justice, and a serious bible reader. Here is the list of popular books which I believe would have appealed to Edmunds:

**Classical Literature**

Aesop: Fables

Xenophon: Anabasis

Cicero: Orations

Virgil: Aeneid

**Stoicism**

Epictatus: The Enchiridon

Marcus Aurelius: Meditations

**Religion**

Bible

Book of Common Prayer.

The Life and Epistles of Saint Paul

**Rhetoric**

Bacon's Essays: Of Studies

Lord Henry Holm Kanes. Elements of Criticism

Reverend Hugh Blair: Rhetoric and Belles Lettres

**English Literature**

Milton, John. Paradise Lost. (1667)

Scott: Ivanhoe

Scott: Lay of the Last Minstrel

**Shakespeare**

Plays

**Fiction**

Cervantes: Don Quixote.

Daniel Defoe. Robinson Crusoe.

Goldsmith, Oliver. The Vicar of Wakefield.

**History**

Howison: History of Virginia (1846-48)

Irving: Life of George Washington. (1855-1859)

Bancroft's History of the United States (1834-40)

Macaulay: History of England from the Accession of James II.

Randall's Life of Jefferson (1857)

**Law**

Sir William Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765-69).

Kent's Commentaries on American Law (1826-30)

Robinson, Conway. The Practice in the Courts of Law and Equity in Virginia

Greenleaf, Simon. A Treatise on the Law of Evidence (1837)

Patton, John M., Robison, Conway. The Code of Virginia with the Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Rights and Constitution of Virginia.

**Farming**

Allen: Domestic Animals (1847).

**Periodicals**

*Southern Planter*

*Richmond Dispatch*

**Almanacs**

*American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge*

*Cottom's Almanac for Virginia and North Carolina*

**Classical Literature**

The records at the University of Virginia show that Edmunds had a class in "Ancient Languages" there during the year 1828-1829. There are no records from his second year there, but he appears not to have concentrated in ancient languages, because by his final two years from 1830-1832 he did not take any more courses in this subject. Still, it seems likely that he would have had classical books in his collection.

Cantrell records three diarists mentioning Aesop's fables, one by quoting one of the morals; Blackford's wife read it to her son (71). Davis (93) mentioned the continuing popularity of the fables in Virginia through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The pastoral nature of the fables and their stoic morality may have appealed to Southerners. Edmunds may have bought a translation of the fables for his eight children.

Another three of Cantrell's diarists had read Xenophon's *Anabasis*. Since the *Anabasis* is a traditional text for students beginning to learn Greek, it's possible that Edmunds would have exposed to this book and have included it in his collection for his children's education.

Virgil is another good candidate. Southerners' had a soft spot for Romantic literature make it not surprising that Virgil was popular. Five of the diarists mentioned him, and four mentioned the Aeneid. Thomas Jefferson enjoyed bringing Virgil outside for reading (Irving 115).

In his speech to the Conservative State Convention in 1869, Edmunds referred to the Roman Cato, comparing him with Virginians who were willing to vote for the

Republican candidate.[3] Whatever he may have been referring too, Edmunds probably read the *Orations* of Cicero, since they are traditional Latin Reading for students. Especially as a future statesman and orator these could have been useful to him.

**Shakespeare**

Not surprisingly, the diarists Cantrell studied read Shakespeare at least as often as any other literary author. Thirteen of the fifteen read and quoted from the plays (though surprisingly no one mentioned the sonnets) (82). The Blackford family read *King Lear* and Blackford wrote that his mother was reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to him and his children. King Lear was particularly popular: four diarists reported reading it. John Randolph quoted this play to belittle his opponents in the senate, calling them "little dogs… Tray, Blanch, and Sweet-heart, see, they bark at me" (III. Vi. 3) Randolph wrote in a letter in 1817 that Lear was his favorite play and that "in that and in Timon only, it has been said, the bard was in earnest" (Cantrell 86). *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet* were the other plays which at least four of the fifteen writers owned.

**Fiction**

Six journalists studied by Cantrell read Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe. I am doubtful that Edmunds, apparently conservative, besides being a significant slaveholder, would have wanted to read this book, though it is possible he did. Randolph, who owned slaves, read it, but Wailes and Thomas, who were more typical of people living on a plantation, did not (Cantrell).

I was surprised that Cervantes' Don Quixote was read by no less than six of the journalists. According to Davis (Colonial Bookshelf) it was popular in colonial Virginia.

Oliver Goldsmith was another familiar author. Blackford and Randolph read The Vicar of Wakefield. It had also been one of the few novels in Jefferson's library (Davis 123).

**Walter Scott**

Sir Walter Scott was popular in the North, but not nearly as enduringly so as in the South (Tebbel 204). Tebbel negatively describes his popularity in the South as "almost morbid" (205). Cantrell cites Books quoting a Northern bookseller stating that he had send Scott's novels by the trainload to southern readers (he complains that Brooks doesn't cite this comment). Scott's popularity was supposedly so overwhelming that in 1917 a modern writer, H.J. Eckenrode, nicknamed the antebellum South "Sir Walter Scottland" (Osterweis 51). Some southerners identified with Scott's stories so much that they took to adopting some of his language (Osterweis 48). They called themselves "Southrons" instead of "Southerners" as did Scott's English characters which lived south of the Scottish border, and Northerners "Saxons". "Southern chivalry" was another popular term (Hubbell 192).

Mark Twain believed that Scott's romanticism, which he called "Sir Walter's disease" (Osterweis 49) seriously harmed the South. Referring to the Louisiana capitol in Baton Rouge he wrote:

> Sir Walter Scott is probably responsible for the Capitol building; for it is not conceivable that this little sham castle would ever have been built if he had not run the people mad, a couple of generations ago,

> with his medieval romances. The South has not recovered from the debilitating influence of his books. Admiration of his fantastic heroes and their grotesque "chivalry" doings and romantic juvenilities still survives here, and in an atmosphere in which is already perceptible the wholesome and practical nineteenth-century smell of cotton factories and locomotives; and traces of its inflated language and other windy humbuggeries survive along with it. (Clemens [Twain], op. cit., pp.332-333) quoted Osterwies 48).

On another occasion Twain wrote that Walter Scott was "in great measure responsible for the civil war" (Cantrell ix). Tebbell speculates that Scott's intense popularity in the South was a response to the glorification of the feudalism and the fixed social structure in the books. According to his theory, southerners identified passionately with his novels because their own society was feudalistic. The books may have had the power to make even small farmers proud to be members of this romanticized form of society (205).

It is clear that Scott was central to Southerners' readings; but it is hard to accept that his writings actually pushed the South backward. Osterweis points out that though Scott enjoyed a period of popularity in the North, he has never been accused of spawning feudalism in that culture (51). If they had not been exposed to Scott's books, southerners would have probably turned to another writer to imbue their lives and their land with romance. Osterweis suggests the *Morte d'Artur* could have served as the South's theme (51).

Cantrell effectively challenges the idea of Scott's absolute dominance of the South. While the people whose diaries he studied frequently read Scott, they were almost as knowledgeable about Shakespeare and "they also were interested in and read the works of William Shakespeare, almost to the same extent" (186).

Having been raised and educated in the South, Edmunds is sure to have known about Scott's novels. In an uncharacteristically emotional speech he delivered, in 1869 before the Conservative State Convention, he called the Virginians a "gallant, and chivalrous, but fallen people", words that could have come straight from Scott. He repeated these themes throughout the speech, calling for a "noble display" of the "high attributes of a Christian patriot and hero" and stressing women and children for protection. Such themes of patriotism, heroism, and chivalry are very characteristic of Scott, though it may have been his culture that influenced Edmunds rather than Scott's books.

I would also expect to find among Edmunds' books Ivanhoe and Lay of the Last Minstrel, which Cantrell records were owned by three and five of his diarists, respectively. Osterweis (191) and Tebbell (205) mention that the Waverly Novels as particularly popular so I would pick that as well

**Byron**

While Byron was not overwhelmingly popular the way Scott was, he was still commonly read. According to Hubbell (186) his influence was strong, even though it has not been documented nearly as well as it has in the North. He suggests that Byron was popular because of his conservatism. Byron was proud of being read in America. In 1813 he wrote that the "first tidings that ever sounded like Fame in my ears- to be redde on the banks of the Ohio!" (Hubbell 186). On the other hand in his article about Thomas Jefferson ("Thomas Jefferson and the Book Arts") Tebbell holds up Thomas Jefferson's interest in Lord Byron as an example of how his tastes were "atypical" of Southerners. Don Quixote, which is said to have been the only

book that Jefferson read twice, was a satire on the social system that Scott's novels romanticized (205). Six of the diarists that Cantrell studied mentioned various works by Byron.

**Other Literature**

In colonial households, according to Davis, Samuel Butler's Hudibras made him the most popular seventeenth-century writer; but only two of the diarists studied by Cantrell, Randolph and LeVert, read this book. These two -- an intensely intellectual senator and the leader of a salon -- were probably the most likely to go beyond mainstream literature. I did not choose Hudibras writings for Edmunds' list.

John Milton, who Davis reports was the second- most read writer in the colonial south (106), remained popular into antebellum times. Cantrell reports that though Milton did not enjoy the success that Shakespeare did, he still was well-known to educated Southerners (89). Three diarists, (Cornish, Meek, and Smith), owned Paradise Lost. I think Edmunds would have owned this too.

Thomas Moore was also read by three diarists. I was surprised that The Seasons by James Thompson was owned by six of the diarists. The Task by William Cowper, was also read by four of the diarists: Blackford, Randolph, Schenck, and Thomas.

Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe seems likely to have been included. Defoe's popularity in Virginia since the revolution. Davis writes in his Colonial Bookshelf that "Defoe was occasionally present" (119) while in Intellectual Life he writes that "Defoe… was almost always present". Cantrell reports that Robinson Crusoe was read by three of the diarists (Blackford, Randolph, and Schenck). Edmunds may have bought this book for himself and his eight children.

**Religious books**

Edmunds was almost surely a member of the Episcopal Church. His parents had a small Episcopal parish called Grace Church[4] on their plantation Elm Hill; and his son Paul Carrington Edmunds is buried at St. John's Episcopal Church in Halifax.

Davis writes that in colonial times, the South was more secular in its reading tastes than New England (27). Walker Percy argues in his essay that the South was more Stoic in its philosophy than Christian: "How like him [an antebellum southerner] to have had Epictetus in his pocket; how unlike him to have had the psalms" (343). The South, like all other regions of the United States was overwhelmingly Christian. A typical Southern library contained the Bible and prayer book if it contained anything. The diarists that Cantrell studied all showed that almost every one knew the Bible well and very often cited or alluded to biblical passages in letters and speeches (171).

Edmunds's speeches indicate that he was a serious bible reader. In his speech before the Conservative State Convention in 1969, he briefly refers to Felix- assuming that his listeners know that he was speaking of Paul's Sermon before Felix in Acts 24:25. Today, it is hard to imagine such obscure biblical details being mainstream knowledge. Later in the same speech he quotes the book of Corinthians (16:22) where the Apostle Paul uses the words "anathema marantha". At the time this speech was written these words were thought to be a curse.[5] People also read religious pamphlets and periodicals. Religious and church publications make up between ten and eleven percent of the roughly 1,100 titles read by the diarists in Cantrell's study (168).

Most of the advertisements for books that appeared in periodicals only mentioned carrying Bibles and prayer books as well as specific titles on other subjects such as politics or law. I found advertisements posted by the Episcopal Booksellers in Philadelphia for religious books in the Richmond Enquirer (Tuesday, January 3, 1860). They were on the history of the Book of Common Prayer and two books on services. None of the specific books advertised were in Cantrell's list. John Hamilton Cornish, an Episcopal priest, was the only diarists did read commentary on the Book of Common Prayer. Five of the diarists (Blackford, Randolph, Cornish, Smith, and Thomas) read the prayer book itself (177).

Edmunds was certain to have owned the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. Given his display of a thorough knowledge of the Bible and especially the Epistles, I would choose John Locke's *Notes on Saint Paul* for Edmunds' shelves. John Randolph had used this book in understanding Paul (Cantrell 172).

**Rhetoric**

During his time in the legislature Mr. Edmunds was admired as an orator. His obituary in the *Dispatch* describes him as a "close, and clear, and concise logician" and that "Plain and simple in his language, and direct, rapid, and animated in discussion". Little, in his History of Richmond (quoted in the notes of Emma Edmunds) wrote that "his style of speaking is easy and graceful, rather noted for its quiet flow of words and for its logical evolution of thoughts and arguments than for impassioned eloquence or a vigorous display of power" (Little 276).

As a congressman and lawyer John Edmunds had almost surely read the Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres by the Reverend Hugh Blair. William Russell Smith (cited Hubbell 178) wrote that in rural Alabama, the closest thing to a library that existed was a stack of schoolbooks including The Columbian Orator and Blair's Rhetoric which was for advanced students of English. Cantrell was surprised at the lack of reading on the subject of rhetoric on the whole (80), but he found that two of the diarists mentioned the Rhetoric.

John Randolph and two other diarists studied by Cantrell (Mercer and Cornish) had also read the Elements of Criticism by Lord Henry Holm Kanes (1696-1792). O'Brien lists this book along with Blair's Rhetoric as fundamental to southern education and understanding of the world (683-691). He points to Henry Junius Nott, a law professor at South Carolina, used this book, along with Blair's Rhetoric based on his curriculum on these two books (O'Brien 684).

Edmunds must have been familiar with the writing of Roger Bacon, because he prefaced his 1869 speech to the Democratic Party of Halifax with Bacon's words: "Read, not to contradict and confute, not to believe and take for granted, but to weigh and consider." It was a request for thoughtfulness in a time of upheaval; though the speech that followed showed an uncharacteristic and disturbing emotion. It is full of anger against Wells and another republican candidates, who "the union of nineteen-twentieths of the negro votes with these venal and mercenary carpet-baggers who have been the fomenters of discord and strife between the two races."

Cantrell recorded that Mercer read Bacon's Essays: Of Studies. I chose this book, the Elements of Criticism, the Rhetoric and Belles Lettres as books that could reasonably have been in Edmunds' library.

**History and Politics**

As I have noted, John R. Edmunds entered the legislature in his early twenties (*Dispatch* obituary). His interest in politics and was apparently typical of Virginians. Politics were the passion of the South. According to a writer in the Southern Quarterly Review (cited Sachman 96), "We breakfast on politics, lunch with party, dine with cooperation, sup with wire-pullers, and sleep with bad fellows…"

Southerners were very well-informed on the Constitution and it wasn't uncommon for an antebellum southerner to have memorized the Constitution (Cantrell ix). Davis quoted one colonial Virginian's statement that Mercer's Abridgement of All the Public Acts of Assembly (1737) was more often in libraries than the Bible (24). This is probably hyperbolic, but it is clear that Virginians were strongly interested in politics.

Especially to the patriotic and nostalgic Virginians, American history went hand-in-hand with politics. Davis wrote that in colonial times books on law and politics played a close second to religious reading. The Virginia papers and almanacs I looked at contained more advertisements for history than for any other subject except law. Most of papers simply advertised the topics of the books they had, but a few listed specific titles for sale. Edmunds surely would have wanted a history of Virginia; he seems as likely to have owned Howison's History of Virginia, which Blackford read (Cantrell 206). As for American history, any one of the books

mentioned by Cantrell could have been available to Edmunds. George Bancroft's History of the United States, which was read by Blackford and mentioned by Mercer (205), could have been in his library.

Newspapers carried advertisements for biographies of famous Americans. Randall's Life of Jefferson, advertised regularly in the Richmond *Daily Enquirer* in late 1860s would have probably appealed to Edmunds. The Works of Irving were also advertised. Irving's Life of George Washington was read by two of the diarists, so I chose this as a feasible biography for Edmunds.

The comments in Edmunds' speeches show that he had more than a rudimentary knowledge of European history. I have already mentioned his (possibly erroneous) reference to the Roman Cato in a speech in 1869. In the same speech he referred to revolutionary tribunals in France (2).

European history was particularly popular with Southerners. In keeping with the Southerners' habit of identifying themselves with the English, several of Catrell's diarists reported reading histories of England. Wailes, Randolph, and Blackford read Hume's History of England, which Blackford described as "exceedingly dull" (Cantrell 202). Schenck, Thomas, and Thomas read Macauley's History of England from the Accession of James II. This work was also advertised in the *Daily Enquirer* in an ad that ran repeatedly through late 1861.

It is difficult to know from what specific book Edmunds might have gotten his knowledge on French Revolutionary history. Several of Cantrell's diarists read books on French history that were read in English translations. The History of the French Revolution by Joseph Tiers, which was read by David Schenck, is possible.

**Law**

I found that law books advertised very often in newspapers; Carmichael and others describe how the law profession that Edmunds entered was packed with young Virginians. Edmunds would have a number of law books in his library like Cantrell reports that the lawyers Meek and Mercer did -- each of them had six (234). Both owned Sir William Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765-69). Cantrell quotes Meek (235) on the experience of studying law- books "as dry and barren of interest as a Cape Cod Sandhill – as long and abstruse as the dungeons of Bastile [sic] – as narcotic and drowsy as a bed of opium" would be more amusing that the "eternal scribbling and scratching" that his tutor Peter Martin made him to. Nevertheless he found Blackstone's work "not only perspicuous, but often eloquent".

Both men also read Kent's Commentaries on American Law (1826-30) (Cantrell 236). Mercer was also reading A Treatise on the Law of Evidence (1837) which went through many editions according to Cantrell (237).

J.W. Randolph advertised a list of law books advertised in the *Enquiror* in late 1861. Three of them are by a man named "Robinson". I looked in the WorldCat database and found a number of books on law by Conway Robinson that were published in Virginia in the time 1830-1850. Edmunds might have owned any of them. The book advertised as "Robinson's Virginia Practice", which was probably The Practice in the Courts of Law and Equity in Virginia, seems likely to have been in his library. This three-volume set was published from 1832 to 1839, and is now owned by 39 libraries.

Since Edmunds indicated a particular interest in laws of Virginia, I also chose Patton and Robinson's The Code of Virginia with the Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Rights and Constitution of Virginia (1849). As noted in the introduction, Edmunds was a delegate to the 1851 Virginia Convention to revise the 1830 Constitution.

**Periodicals**

While the growth of book-publishing was significant in the North in the 18th century, periodical publishing was more important both the North and South. Tebbel writes (121) "the history of publishing in the eighteenth century is much more notable for newspaper printing than for the printing of books". Cantrell agrees that in the South the best writing appeared in newspapers (6). Periodicals were becoming more popular in the decades leading up to 1860 (O'Brien 334). In A History of American Magazines Frank Luther Mott estimates that between 1825 and 1850 the number of periodicals in America grew from less than one hundred to six hundred (Spivey page 3). Virginia produced a large number of publications including the Virginia Advocate, Virginia Spectator, Richmond Dispatch, Richmond Enquirer, and many almanacs. The most famous southern literary publication according to Cantrell (6) was the Southern Literary Messenger. This magazine, which was published in Richmond, mainly published poetry and essays. Some of Edgar Allen Poe's original work was published for the first time in this magazine.

The Messenger faced strong competition in the South from northern literary magazines. In 1855 one of the editors of the Messenger complained that Harper's Weekly, a publication based in New York, had five times their subscribers south of

the Potomac (Cantrell 6, from Avery O. Craven's Growth of Southern Nationalism). The Messenger also competed with Knickerbocker Magazine which may have been the most influential literary magazine. It published poems, tales, serial novels, translation, and other prose items. One issue contained original writings from Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Longfellow, and Alfred B. Street (Spivey 2). The magazine folded in 1865 as a result of the Civil War. Edgar Allen Poe had a long-standing but unexplained dislike for the Knickerbocker's publisher Lewis Clark. This appears to be why he turned to its rival the Southern Literary Messenger to publish his work.

Southern Planter, a magazine "devoted to Agriculture, Horticulture, and the Household Arts," would certainly have appealed to John Edmunds and probably to the people who worked under him. The articles about how to plough for wheat, the price of wheat (September 1855), etc. would have especially interested him. There are statistics of the exports and imports of certain crops, which show that 1847 was a "famine year" abroad, and there was an unusually large amount of wheat exported.

**Agriculture**

Edmunds' record shows that he took at least one course in "natural philosophy". In his Agricultural Address in 1848 he demonstrated in-depth study of farming. The soil of Virginia was wearing out, he asserted, through poor farming; in contrast, England, after having their soil for thousands of years, was producing much more with it. With many examples, he showed how careful planning and precision were essential to making the efficient use of the soil. He asserted that most farmers, when asked how much grain was needed to keep an ox in good condition, would

answer an arm full of hay, a measurement, Edmunds asserted, “Coveys about as much information as to say this article is the size of a piece of chalk”. He spoke of how farmers needed to know the exact percent of grain of an animal’s weight was needed to make him grow; the exact depth to plow the soil in order not to let the lye run out of it.

In his speech, he quotes Allen’s Domestic Animals; looking on Worldcat I found that this book was published in 1847 and that there are 68 copies of it listed in existence in book form and microform. This was apparently a significant book so I included it on the master list.

For further information Edmunds was sure to have subscribed to at least one almanac. In colonial times an average household’s library consisted solely of almanacs and a bible (Tebbell Between Covers). By the early 1800s five hundred almanacs were still being published (Sagendorph 150). They provided calendars, listed the elected government officials, weather, astrological tables, advice on how to live well, and a variety of other information. The American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge contained Christian, Hebrew, and “Mohametan” calendar, and contained information on all the states and major cities; a list of “consuls and commercial agents in Foreign Countries”, imports and exports, etc. Since much of the information such and times of sunrise and sunset were localized, almanacs from different regions didn’t compete with each other very much. Cottom’s Virginia and North Carolina Almanac, which was adapted to the latitude and longitude of Richmond, and had weather predictions for specific dates throughout the year, all the elected officials in Virginia and North Carolina, and the court system and judges.

I imagine JRE having the American Almanac and Cottom's Virginia and North Carolina Almanac in addition to the Southern Planter for information about the political world that he was a part of and about farming.

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[3] I could not find what Edmunds could have been referring to. "Cato the Elder" and "Cato the Younger" were senators in the time of the Roman republic, but neither seem to have been known for corruption. He may have confused Cato with Cataline, whose plot to overthrow the Roman Senate was exposed by Cicero in his *Orations.*

[4]Robert Pottage, a descendent of Edmunds and resident of Halifax Virginia; he cited the Coles Family Virginia (Coles, 1933).

[5]In the Greek translation of the bible, the words "anathema marantha" were left in the original Aramaic. In the nineteenth century they were believed to be a curse. The exact meaning of this phrase is still unclear, but it is no longer to be a curse.

# Conclusion

A bookshelf can tell much about the values of a society and the individual owner. It tells us at least as much about how a society *wants* to see itself. Southern reading coincides with Edmunds' likely reading, reflecting people who identified themselves in turn as heroic, chivalric, idealistic, and revolutionary. It reflected universal ideals, as well as uniquely southern ones. What set him and other southerners apart from contemporary northerners were their particular admiration for English and European thought; and their emphasis on public matters and the law.

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